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### Something for everyone? Changes and choices in the ethno-party scene in urban nightlife

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## Chapter 8 The Moroccan Leisure Scene

### **Moroccan party, Sunday Afternoon, spring 2007**

*On a Sunday afternoon, women who are all dressed up stand in line waiting impatiently for the doors of Club Paradiso to open. Some groups talk loudly and excitedly about the event to come, while others complain about the long queue. Only a few hours ago, on the Saturday night, more young people were queuing to get into Club Paradiso as well. They were also dressed up and chatting excitedly in small groups. On this Sunday, however, the composition of the queue is completely different; it is a unisex group of women of all ages, all of Moroccan descent. They have come together for the women's only party, Hafla Anissa.*

*As soon as I get inside, I walk around the entire venue to see what is where and what is going on. Down the hall, I see small groups of colourfully dressed women talking to each other excitedly. After ordering a drink at the bar, which only sold non-alcoholic beverages, Moroccan music reaches my ears as I open the door to the main hall. I am surprised by these unfamiliar tones and sounds in such a familiar place as Club Paradiso. I feign a relaxed attitude. While listening to the music and watching the dancing crowd, I am grabbed by the atmosphere, not as a participant but as an observer. I see young women dancing happily, moving their hips and shoulders intensely to the rhythm of the beat. Sweat is pouring from their faces, and they have their eyes closed or are staring in total ecstasy at an unknown point in the room. To me, the silent observer, it seems as if they have emotionally drifted away to a party in the hot and damp climate of Morocco.*

*After these intense observations, I walk back into the entrance hall and see a group of young girls with big bags heading towards the ladies room. Inside there, the air is filled with excited voices and the smell of hairspray and make-up, which is being touched up. Within minutes they have prepared themselves for the party by changing outfits. They entered the ladies room as schoolgirls and came out as party girls. The transformation is evident; they look much more exuberant. I am happy to discover that the way I am*

*dressed this afternoon does not set me apart from the dance crowd. My carefully selected shirt with long sleeves fits in with the dress code at this party. I feel comfortable enough to go back out there and drink in the music, the people and the atmosphere.*

## **8.1 Introduction**

The Moroccan leisure scene is a relatively new player in the ethno-party market. According to the organization, *Marmoucha*, one of the first commercial Moroccan parties was organized in the mid 1990s, with the aim of putting Moroccan music on the Dutch nightlife agenda and offering young Moroccans a space where they could listen and dance to these sounds. In the early days, it was predominantly raï-parties where people could dance to Algerian and Moroccan music. By the end of the 1990s, however, the emphasis had shifted to Moroccan sounds and beats (predominantly Shaabi, which is popular Moroccan folk music) and other fashionable genres such as Arabic pop, RnB and hip-hop. These parties are now organized by a small group of established cultural organizations (commercial and non-profit), with *Marmoucha* and *Success Media and Publishing (SMP)* being the most well known in the Netherlands.

What follows is a detailed account of the development of the Moroccan leisure scene in the Netherlands. After a general description of its characteristics, size and popularity, I will set out in more detail the features of the three party organizations which have been part of this research. In the third paragraph, the strategies used by these producers to gain and retain a trustworthy reputation are centralized. In the fourth paragraph, the opinions and behaviour of the consumers of this scene are examined. Here, the reasons and motivations behind the choice of the Moroccan leisure circuit will be analyzed. Finally, the last paragraph revolves around the decisions that young people make when it comes to attending a particular party *within* the Moroccan leisure scene.

## **8.2 The creation of the Moroccan leisure scene**

The Moroccan party scene is very different to mainstream nightlife or indeed other ethno-party circuits. Moroccan parties usually take place on Sundays in the late afternoon, or early on Saturday

evenings, ending before the regular clubbing events begin. This is because a lot of young Moroccans (especially females) are not allowed to go out late at night. Another change to make the parties more accessible to their target audience is that no alcohol is served. Many young Moroccans do not drink alcohol (in public) and prefer to not go to places where it is served. Another difference to the regular party scene is the popularity of *Hafla Anissa*, which are parties exclusively for women. *Hafla Anissa* events take place on Sunday afternoons and consist of workshops and fashion shows, alternated with a clubbing party in which a female DJ lures the crowd onto the dance floor.

With its early opening hours and no-alcohol policy, the Moroccan leisure scene has adjusted to the specific cultural needs of its audience. A further reason for organizing Moroccan parties is the lack of Moroccan music in mainstream nightlife. Moreover, many young Moroccan men don't feel welcome in that scene, having experienced discrimination at the doors of popular clubs or the feeling that they are being closely watched by the security men inside the venues. According to the diverse Moroccan party organizations, all of these factors have contributed to the creation of the Moroccan leisure scene.

### *Size and popularity*

The availability of Moroccan parties is very diverse. There are concerts by various Moroccan artists, festivals with Moroccan music, lounge-events in which Moroccan music is combined with RnB, fashion-shows displaying the latest in bridal fashion, workshops (literature, poetry henna etc), debates, prom-nights and *Hafla Anissa* parties. Most of the cultural organizations focus predominantly on debates and workshops, and arrange a dance or a prom night once a year. Tans (Towards a New Start) is one such organization. As well as lectures, debates and workshops, it puts on an annual prom night which attracts 1500-2000 well educated young Moroccans.

The crowds at Moroccan parties are extremely diverse, and their constitution largely depends on the type of event that is being organized. Women in every age category visit concerts and unisex parties. Dance parties, on the other hand, are mainly attended by

young people aged between 18 and 30 years old.

*Moroccan party organizations in the Netherlands*

In order to make a comparison between the three ethno-party scenes possible, I have chosen to include only those activities which resemble clubbing. The main criterion was that dancing to music produced by DJs was the key purpose of the event. Accordingly, Shaabi nights, lounge/dance parties and *Hafla Anissa* parties were included, while debates and workshops were not. These dance parties are put on by three different Moroccan organizations: *Marmoucha* and the *Argan Youth Centre* in Amsterdam and *Success Media and Publishing* in Den Bosch.

*Marmoucha* organized its first event in 1998. Its goal was to create a space for Moroccan music within existing clubbing venues. Furthermore, it wanted to make music from the Maghreb accessible and known to both Moroccans and their native Dutch peers. *Marmoucha* is funded by the local government and works closely with Club Paradiso in Amsterdam. Since 1998, the organization has expanded its program and now arranges about 60 events a year, both in and outside Amsterdam. This program is very diverse, and includes concerts, workshops and dance events. Two of these dance parties, *Marmoucha Maghreb Dance* and *Hafla Anissa*, are organized every two or three months in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

*Marmoucha Maghreb Dance* is a musical spectacle involving two of the most important music genres in the Maghreb, Shaabi and Raï, and artists from Morocco, Algiers and the Netherlands take the stage during this event. DJs and VJs are also used to stir up the crowd. This party takes place on Saturday afternoons between five and 11pm in the popular mainstream venue, Club Paradiso, in Amsterdam. The audience is mainly comprised of young people of Moroccan descent in the age range 18 to 30.

*Hafla Anissa* is a party exclusively for women. It also takes place in Club Paradiso in Amsterdam, this time on a Sunday afternoon. It usually starts at 2pm and ends at seven. Due to the variety of the program and the separate rooms in Club Paradiso, women of varying ages, such as groups of friends, nieces, aunts, and mothers with their (young) children, come to this dance event

together.

*Urban Rai Zone* by the *Argan Youth Centre* was started in 2004 by a group of Moroccan boys who wanted to create a space where young Moroccans could hang out in their free time. Argan is a youth centre in the heart of Amsterdam, where all sorts of activities such as sports (boxing, fitness, and aerobics), music-lessons, debates, workshops and dance nights are organized. Every month, on a Friday afternoon between five and 10pm, the *Urban Rai Zone*, which is a dance party for young Moroccans aged between 15 and 25, takes place. *Argan* started organizing these parties three years ago in an effort to create a space for youngsters who could not afford the high entrance fees of mainstream nightlife and were not allowed to go out late at night.

*Hafla Chaabia* by *Success Media and Publishing* is a large event, organized once a year. *Hafla Chaabia* can be best translated as a popular (folk) party. With his organization, *Success Media & Publishing*, the director wanted to arrange cultural activities with which to get Dutch-Moroccans in touch with their background and introduce Moroccan culture to the native Dutch population. By attracting very famous and popular Moroccan artists, the company tried to pique the interest of the Moroccan community in cultural activities. At first, only concerts with a single famous artist were arranged, but when the organization became more popular and had built up a solid reputation, the concerts were extended and became events. These events include performances by a variety of artists from both Morocco and elsewhere, and the venues are decorated with food stands and merchandise. The crowd at *Hafla Chaabia* is very diverse, varying from families with young children, to groups of older men, to peer groups aged between 18 and 30. This last group makes up the majority of the attendees. *Hafla Chaabia* is organized once a year and takes place in the event hall in Den Bosch, starting at 4pm and continuing until 10.30.

### **8.3 Keeping it safe: strategies of the producers**

The Moroccan cultural and leisure organizations have to deploy diverse strategies to make their events attractive to a Moroccan audience. Moreover, in this Moroccan leisure scene, these strategies do not arise from competition between the organizations, but are

related to the unfamiliarity of the members of the Moroccan community with commercially arranged events. Most of the social activities of Moroccan families take place at weddings or other family festivities. Indeed, concerts (popular and classical), festivals, and bars and clubs are rarely visited by first generation Moroccans. Even at so-called multicultural festivals, such as the Dunja festival in Rotterdam which is organized to stimulate exchanges between cultures, very few first generation Moroccan migrants are in attendance. Participation by second generation Moroccans is a bit higher, but is still low compared to other ethnic groups. Accordingly, Moroccan party organizations not only have to take into account the unfamiliarity of its target group with formally arranged events, but they also have to put a lot of effort into gaining the trust of their visitors and making their activities appealing and accessible. What follows is a description of the strategies the three organizations referred to above deploy to make their events attractive to their clients.

*Promoting the party: creating a safe and reliable reputation*

During an interview, the organizer of *Hafla Chaabia* emphasized that he deliberately avoids using the word party in the announcements of his activities. Instead, he uses the word event, because in his opinion the term party has a negative connotation of alcohol and dark, immoral activities, while event connotes the more cultural aspects of what is actually taking place. During the interview, the director frequently pointed to the importance of building a reputation as a safe Moroccan cultural organization. Indeed, according to all three of the organizations, many Dutch-Moroccans have had negative experiences with Moroccan companies which did not arrange their events properly. Sometimes the artists they had booked did not show up, and instead of refunding the ticket or making an announcement, the audience was simply confronted with a different act. On other occasions, a Moroccan party or concert had ended in a massive fight, which led to feelings of insecurity in the crowd.

All of the organizations pay a great deal of attention to security and service. The latter principally entails clean and adequate numbers of toilets, proper food and drink, no long queues for food

and a secure cloakroom. They all stressed that good organization prevents irritation and agitation, which can easily degenerate into a disturbance or a fight. One of the organizers underlined this by giving the following example:

‘You have to make sure that the cloakroom is carefully secured and that people do not have to stand in line too long. For example, if you do not have a guarded cloakroom it is possible that at the end when people collect their jackets and coats they can’t find their own coat. They do not go to the police because they want their jacket back instantly. This is even more important when they went to the party with their brother’s coat. So, the guy whose jacket is missing goes looking for it straight away. He might get into a fight with the person who has his jacket. It starts small, but because everybody knows a lot of other people, before you know it the whole crowd is fighting. Good organization can prevent this’.

An important aspect of keeping an event or party safe is related to the number of bouncers and security men present. If there are enough people and someone starts a fight, it can be resolved quickly before it gets out of hand. If an event or party ends in a massive fight, or when smaller fracas occur frequently, the organizations will become less popular. Moreover, they can even be fined or closed down by the local authorities if things go badly wrong. Furthermore, club owners, concert halls or pop venues will not cooperate with organizations whose events end up in fights or conflict with the local police. Not serving alcohol also helps to create a safer event because people who are drunk are more likely to start a fight than those who are sober.

#### *Advertising the party*

Just as in the Asian party and the Turkish clubbing scenes, flyers and posters are distributed in places where the target group comes together. Accordingly, they can be found in Moroccan restaurants, bars and at local community centres which are visited by many Moroccan youngsters. On the internet, the majority of

advertisements are to be found on the Moroccan websites and community sites which are visited by a young Moroccan audience<sup>13</sup>. Because it is affiliated with club Paradiso, *Marmoucha* also advertises its parties on the club's website.

In general, all of the communications about the parties arranged by the three organizations are in a mixture of Moroccan and Dutch. These two languages also appear next to each other on the companies' websites, although the majority of the text is in Dutch. This is done to make the website accessible to a wider audience, but is also due to the different languages spoken in Morocco.

### *Door policy*

Another way to protect the atmosphere at a party or event is the execution of a very strict door policy. The audience is not screened by outfit, outward appearance or age. However, because most activities take place during the day and no alcohol is served, there are no formal age restrictions. Accordingly, children are allowed to enter the premises as well when accompanied by adults. Women with or without headscarves can also attend. Men are allowed to wear trainers but have to take off their caps. According to the bouncers, it is much easier to hide an aggressive expression behind a cap, which is why this rule applies.

In general, people who turn up to events who are clearly under the influence of alcohol or drugs are refused entry. Likewise, when people arrive with a so-called 'aggressive attitude', they are also not allowed in by the bouncers. This does not happen very often, because most of the visitors know the rules and are aware of how strictly they are applied. As one of the men at a Moroccan party told me:

'You really do not want to mess with these bouncers. They are not afraid to literally kick you out of the club if you cause trouble.'

The high numbers of security men, and their resolute performance in combination with a good service, minimize the chances of any

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<sup>13</sup> For example, [www.maroc.nl](http://www.maroc.nl), [www.marokko.nl](http://www.marokko.nl)

violence. All three organizations named these strategies as being very important if their events are to remain popular.

### *Music*

By programming diverse Moroccan music at an event, the organizations attract young people from different regions of Morocco. The target group of young Moroccans is relatively small and the companies, therefore, do not want to limit themselves to, for instance, the Berber population or the Arabs. Accordingly, you will hear the music from the different regions at all of the parties. According to the organizations, these parties and events have created a space where formally separated groups of Moroccans come together, party and meet. Gazzah, who studied the music and identify formation of Dutch Moroccan young people even claims that ‘when Dutch-Moroccan youths come together in these musical contexts, internal differences seem to temporarily disappear’ and that a ‘coherent Dutch-Moroccan community’ is created during a Moroccan party (2005: 6).

### *Costs*

Another strategy to keep the Moroccan party accessible to its audience is to keep the price of the entrance tickets as low as possible. According to the organizers of *Marmoucha* and the *Urban Rai Zone*, many Moroccans are unwilling or unable to spend much money on cultural activities. *Urban Rai Zone*, for instance, was purposely set up as a low cost dance party. Similarly, *Marmoucha* tries to keep the cost of entry to its events as low as possible. This organization is funded by the local government and uses this to keep ticket prices affordable, with the average cost being 15 Euros. This is comparable to the entrance fees of parties held in the mainstream club circuit. The difference is that for the same money, visitors can also enjoy small concerts and live performances.

The man behind *Hafla Chaabia*, on the other hand, also cited the importance of keeping costs as low as possible, but was very much against any governmental funding. He was of the opinion that it created false competition and the funded organizations were not free when it came to the programming of their activities. He told me that he keeps prices as low as possible by organizing an event

commercially and driving hard bargains with artists.

## **8.4 Choosing the Moroccan leisure scene**

In this third section I will shed light on the personal factors which played a role in the choices made about participating in the Moroccan leisure scene. As in the previous two chapters, in section 8.4.1 I will highlight the social mechanisms of the processes of identification and differentiation. The experiencing of feelings of belonging and social rules are also centralized. The second dimension of personal factors concerns cultural elements, and these are analyzed in section 8.4.2. In particular, the cultural features of music, dress, dance and cultural rules play an important role in the processes of identification and differentiation within both a dance crowd and a party. Finally, in section 8.4.3, the restrictions which determine these choices negatively are unravelled.

### **8.4.1 The social dimension**

#### *Friends*

Along with your friends, you either decide where to go out or you just follow them in terms of their nightlife choices. Many of the young Moroccan women I met at the Moroccan parties claimed to predominantly have friends with a Moroccan background like themselves. They said that they hang out with ‘other’ people at school but spent their free time with co-ethnics. Furthermore, the respondents often named family members as their closest friends. Similarities in lifestyle are, according to many young women, an important factor in their friendships, as one young woman explained:

‘I also have Dutch friends at school, but outside school I only hang out with my Moroccan friends. Our friendship is much closer and we have known each other since we were kids. It is so much easier with them you know, we have the same lifestyle. I do not always have to explain, we understand...for example why I do not go out on Saturday night, or why I cannot come to her [native Dutch friend] birthday party’.

Many young Moroccan men, on the other hand, told me that although their closest friends are of Moroccan descent, they preferred to go out in a mixed group. These men alternated between visiting mainstream club nights with a mix of friends and participating in the Moroccan party scene with their Moroccan acquaintances. One man preferred this variety:

‘Most of the time I go out in a mixed group of friends; we visit all different clubs and bars, we do not have a favourite club or anything. Every now and then I go out with my Moroccan friends to a concert or a Marmoucha party. It is nice to see so many young Moroccans and to dance with my friends to Moroccan music. I really enjoy both very much’.

Only a few of the men I talked to said that they only have Moroccan friends, but all of them also liked to visit other places, such as bars and cinemas. Moroccan parties do not take place every week and because these events end early, many young men visit other venues afterwards.

Young people influence each other in terms of their taste in music, clothing styles, or lifestyle in general. For instance, one DJ, who mainly works in the south of the Netherlands, told me that he had changed his repertoire from western RnB to Moroccan music because of some new friends he had made and a holiday spent in the country. He does not understand Arabic or Berber, but likes the rhythm and tone, and feels that he ‘needs to learn more about his roots’ by listening to and studying Moroccan music.

### *Feelings of belonging*

Going out to clubs is not as commonplace for many young Moroccans as it might be for other groups. Most of the women I met during the Moroccan events told me that they do not visit ordinary parties or cafés. Indeed, the majority of the women said that they stay at home on Saturday nights or visit family and friends with their parents. Only a few young Moroccan women told me that they are not allowed to go out at all by their parents, but the majority claimed to not be interested in doing so anyway, because they expected to be treated badly by (drunken) men if they went clubbing. Some feared

men in general, while others expected to be harassed by Moroccan men because they would be seen as ‘fallen women’. Nightlife’s bad reputation within the Moroccan community, the service of alcohol, and the late opening hours of clubs contributes to feelings of not belonging for many young Moroccan women.

Most of the men agreed with the women about the negative image of mainstream nightlife. As one young man told me:

‘I do not have a problem with going out, I go out a lot, but many others, especially the older generation, associate nightlife with drugs, alcohol and sex. They think of it as places you should avoid, women especially should not go there. They think that only bad and sleazy women go there’.

As well as these internal judgments within the Moroccan community about mainstream nightlife, many young Moroccans also told me that they don’t feel welcome in that scene. According to them, the current political climate is widening the gap between the native Dutch population and Moroccans, and the media was often accused of creating a negative image of the Moroccan people in the Netherlands.

### *Social rules and flirting*

Almost all of the men and women I met at a Moroccan party told me that they weren’t interested in the opposite sex at these events. Most of the women explained that they prefer a *Hafla Annisa* (women’s only) party, because at mixed events they feel like they are being watched by the men. These parties, in which elements of Moroccan culture are mixed with Dutch clubbing culture, are a huge success and attract large numbers of consumers who do not want, or are not allowed, to dance at a party in the presence of men. These women’s only events do not exist in Morocco, or indeed in any other European country; the women there simply have to make a choice between participating in mixed parties or staying at home.

*Social control*

When it comes to flirting, both the men and the women I spoke to said that the presence of family and friends prevented them from ‘*making a move*’. They explained that they use the internet to get in touch with that one particular nice guy instead. Internet dating or sites like maroc.nl, matchmaker.nl or yasmina.nl are popular with many young Moroccans because they can talk to each other or set up a date without anybody else watching them. According to my key informants and some internet research, a lot of young Moroccans also use the internet and chat rooms to get information about going out in both mainstream nightlife and in the Moroccan leisure scene. Sometimes, the discussions are about which party to visit, and occasionally there is a heated debate about how bad nightlife is for (predominantly) young women and men.

Most of the men I talked to said that they disagree with the lack of participation of women in nightlife, and they all disapproved of the social control that women faced. As one said:

‘Just as it is for men, for women [it should be] possible to go out and to have fun while respecting your Islamic lifestyle. It is all about your behaviour, how you act. But our women are not allowed to go out and if they do go out they run the risk of ruining their reputation and being gossiped about as being haram’.

It is difficult to generalize the attitudes of Moroccans towards nightlife and going out. They are ambivalent about it themselves, and prejudices and stereotyping exist not only between men and women but also within the sexes. This makes it especially difficult for women to navigate between the images and ideas about nightlife in general on the one hand, and attending Moroccan parties and listening to music on the other. Many young women use the internet and chat rooms for advice about going out and Moroccan parties.

**8.4.2 The cultural dimension**

Dancing is the most visible response to music, and is perhaps the most overt bodily practice in clubbing. It is an encounter between body and mind, and is often looked upon as an embodied statement

by the clubber of liberation from the hardship or pressure of everyday life; in other words it is a way to 'shake off the difficulties during the week' (Malbon 1998). Cultural practices like music, dancing and the atmosphere in clubs are strongly related, and are important factors in the choice of a particular venue or party.

### *Music*

There are many different musical genres that are popular among young Moroccans. Most of those I met at Moroccan parties liked traditional Moroccan and Arabic pop, as well as so-called urban music and hip-hop. In mainstream nightlife, however, Arabic pop or Moroccan musical genres such as Shaabi are rarely played. Many of these young Moroccans told me that they go to Moroccan parties in order to listen and dance to their favourite Moroccan artists. As one young man explained:

'It is different you know, of course I do not always want to listen to my own music, but it is part of who I am. I am raised with Shaabi; we dance to it during all kinds of celebrations like weddings and so on. Besides I always watch this kind of music on television. Moroccan music is part of who I am'.

Shaabi, which means, popular is a form of Moroccan folk music. It is a category consisting of different genres from different regions including, for instance, *Reggada* music from Oujda and *Rewaffa* music from the Rif (Gazzah 2005: 6). It was originally performed in markets, but is now played at any kind of meeting and celebration. Many young Moroccans listen to Shaabi music at home, during holidays in Morocco, or at family celebrations, and it appeals to their Moroccan background and the culture of their parents. By playing Shaabi at a Moroccan party, it helps young people to incorporate elements of their parents' traditions into their own youth culture.

Many young Moroccans who attend Moroccan parties explained that they prefer Moroccan music to other more western styles because of the use of specific instruments and its rhythm. Not only does this music demand another dancing style, but it also has a

religious aspect. There is uncertainty among many young Moroccans about whether or not you are allowed to listen to music according to the rules of the Islam. There are those who claim that music made with certain (Moroccan) instruments is allowed, while others say that all types of music that serve no religious purpose are forbidden, because it distracts you from a strict religious lifestyle. This ambivalence and uncertainty about whether listening to music is allowed or forbidden was expressed by many of the respondents during my interviews. What most of them agreed on, however, was that contemporary western music, with its lyrics about sex, drugs, crime and violence, is not approved of by their parents.

### *Dance*

Observing the crowd at a Moroccan party was a thrilling experience; both the men and the women danced in such a way that the whole room was filled with energy and tension. The women danced with each other and made spectacular hip and shoulder movements to the Shaabi music. The scarves they wrapped around their hips accentuated the movements of the lower parts of their body. Sometimes, these scarves were decorated with little bells that rang gently to the rhythm of the hip swings. Most of these dancing women completely lost themselves in the beat of the music.

It was not only the body that was in motion. When I observed the dancing crowd, I could see a certain type of ecstasy on their faces, as if the music was taking over their body and mind. This was also evident in the replies of many women, who said that they experience a sense of total happiness when they dance. Sentences like: 'I completely forget everything, and I just dance' or 'It is as if you float outside this room right into Morocco' demonstrate how they experienced dancing to Moroccan music. This is what Goffman (1963: 69) has called 'inward emigration', a state of body and mind that temporarily makes you forget the concerns of your daily life.

The men also danced with each other in a circle, often raising their arms to the beat of the music. It was also obvious that the men were very accomplished dancers. Many of them, however, had a kind of 'cool' attitude while dancing, and did not let themselves go as much as the women.

It is not customary for single men and women to dance together in Morocco. Likewise, at Moroccan weddings or birthday parties, you will also see women and men dancing separately. This is sometimes even in different rooms, but most of the time they just dance separately in small groups in the same room. Young Moroccans in the Netherlands have taken over this cultural aspect of dancing, and at most Moroccan parties you will see the men and women dancing in their own male or female groups. Most of the women I spoke to at a *Hafla Annisa* party claimed to feel much freer in the absence of men.

Some women also stated that the presence of men was an important reason why they do not participate in mainstream nightlife. For both men and women, dancing to Moroccan music and the cultural customs thereof were an important reason for choosing the Moroccan party scene.

### *Dress code*

It is always difficult to describe the dress code of a dancing crowd. Not only because people dress differently, but also because it is difficult to put a certain style into words. What was, however, striking were the different styles of outfit present at a single event. I observed veiled women who covered their body carefully with clothing, such as long skirts under long-sleeved shirts. At the same party, I also saw sexily dressed young women with short skirts and tight tops. Others still wore *jabbadors* (traditional Moroccan outfit consisting of a blouse and matching pair of trousers). What they all had in common, however, was that none of them showed much cleavage or wore crop tops, which differs from the clothing styles of young Turkish and Asian women.

Questions about their own outfits and those of others were not answered extensively. Most of the women told me that they wore what they liked best and that they did not have a particular style. The words normal, nice and decent were often used to describe their clothes. When I asked them about the dress codes of ‘others’, most of them did not want to give me any specifics. The most common reply was that everyone is free to wear whatever he or she feels like and they did not have an opinion about it. It is difficult to tell whether this was the result of the briefness of the

conversation and the location (during the party), or whether they were all really very tolerant of other people's dress codes.

The men on the other hand did have more to say about their own dress codes and those of the women. Most of them mentioned a strong desire for expensive clothing brands such as Gucci and Armani. Some wore those outfits themselves and were very proud of this fact, while others stereotyped the owners of expensive brands by calling them 'typical low skilled Moroccan' outfits. They themselves preferred the stylish clothing of more diverse brands and stores as long as the labels were not obviously visible.

When I asked them about how the women dressed, they all pointed to their diverse clothing styles. They did not give me details about what these styles looked like, instead describing them in terms of traditional, modern, or revealing and daring outfits. The dress code of women is dictated, according to most of the men, by cultural and religious rules which prescribe that they should not cause offence with their appearance. The men I talked to had different opinions about this. Some said that they completely agreed with it and that woman who wear sexy and revealing clothes are not proper Moroccan girls. Others, however, explained that they did not agree with the rule, but that it would be best for the young women to subordinate to it. Some of them stated that women in Morocco have more freedom to choose their own style of clothing.

For some of the women in particular, their clothing style was a reason to choose to participate in the Moroccan leisure scene. At a mainstream party they could not wear a headscarf or a *jabbador* without being stared at. Moreover, many of the young women were of the opinion that their native Dutch counterparts show too much skin and dress too sexily. Some explained that they would feel uncomfortable being in the presence of these 'half naked women'.

### *Cultural rules & the role of Islam*

The organization of Moroccan parties, with their early opening and closing hours, no alcohol policy, and women only events, creates a distance between the Moroccan and the mainstream clubbing scenes. The clubbing habits of native Dutch young people do not match the time schedules of the Moroccan party scene, which starts (and ends) early on a Saturday evening or a Sunday afternoon. The majority of

the Moroccans I talked to during the parties told me that they would really appreciate it if more native Dutch youngsters came to Moroccan parties as well. They all preferred a more mixed audience instead of just partying with fellow Moroccans. As one woman explained:

‘We have so much to offer, look at this party, isn’t it great? Dutch people should come and see for themselves that we know how to party. We have a very a vivid and exciting dance culture’

One of the organizers of *Marmoucha* also explained:

‘It would be good if more native Dutch came to Moroccan parties. Then they would see for themselves that we have something to add and that we are not all criminals or religious freaks. We also like to party only at a different time and with different music’.

### **8.4.3 Restrictions**

Selecting your favourite party not only entails processes of taste, but is also influenced by accessibility. Availability, costs, location, bouncers, as well as parents, can all limit the amount of choice that young people have.

#### *Door policy*

Every now and then, the headlines in the Dutch newspapers are about young Dutch-Moroccans who have been being refused entry to mainstream clubs. In 2005, the Dutch Minister of Integration, Rita Verdonk, even went out with a group of Moroccan young men to learn more about the discriminatory practices of bouncers in popular nightlife areas. However, the media attention paid to this subject disappeared just as spontaneously as it had arisen.

It is very difficult to prove discrimination because a bouncer judges a visitor on appearance, which is comprised of a combination of factors, such as clothing style, age, number of people in a group, ethnic background, as well as attitude and the interaction between bouncer and visitor. All parties (bouncers, club owners, young people and the government) agreed, however, that young Moroccan

men have the most difficulty in getting into a club because of the discriminatory practices of bouncers and club owners. Although it is impossible to give precise numbers of those who have been discriminated against, the *feeling* or *fear* of being rejected plays an important role in the decisions made about where to go to.

I have spoken to several young Moroccan men about the door policies of mainstream clubs. Some of them told me that they do not have any problems getting into a regular party. They believed that the young (Moroccan) guys who are discriminated against at the door have a bad attitude and cause trouble. They agreed that bouncers were very capable of making distinctions between genuine party people and troublemakers. However, other young men told me that although they had generally not had any problems getting into a party, they nevertheless knew of 'others' who were refused entry regularly. As one man told me:

'You should join my cousin during a night out. He is a fine young man, but he is discriminated [against] at every club at Leidseplein. [It's] only because he looks like a young Moroccan. I do not have any problems with gaining access but that is because many bouncers think I am Italian, something like that. I do not look like a 'real' Moroccan'.

Finally, there was a group of young men who told me that they were almost always refused entry to mainstream club nights. Bouncers used excuses such as 'members only' or 'we are full' to reject them. Despite all of these negative experiences, only a small minority claimed that they go to Moroccan parties due to the door policies elsewhere. The choices of this small group of men are not made voluntarily, but out of fear and a lack of other options.

#### *The regulatory role of parents*

As well as a restrictive door policy, parents can also play an important role in the nightlife activities undertaken by their children. Some parents do not give them permission to go out at all, while others impose restrictions regarding time, location and who their sons and daughters are allowed to go out with. Young Moroccan women in particular are more restricted in their nightlife choices.

Most of the female respondents explained that they did not talk to their parents about going out because they knew they would never get permission to do so if they did. The word respect was often used to explain why they did not confront their parents with questions about going out. Many young women understood and respected the attitudes of their parents towards nightlife. Even talking to your parents about these issues is viewed as being disrespectful.

Some young women did, however, actually go out without the permission of their parents. They either sneaked out of the house or made up an excuse about staying at a friend's house in order to participate in mainstream night-time activities. This was a very risky venture for these young women, as they ran the risk of bumping into people who knew them or their family. Most of the women explained that they do not have problems with these restrictions, because many of them are allowed to have dinner with friends, go to the movies, or to a public debate on Saturday nights. Moreover, many cultural organizations arrange workshops and debates on topics of interest for young Moroccans. Accordingly, instead of sitting at home on Saturday nights, these young men and women enjoy other types of activity.

### *Economic resources*

Most Moroccan parties take place in Amsterdam. Marmoucha is expanding its scope by occasionally organizing women's only parties in other cities such as Nijmegen, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, but not on a regular basis. Accordingly, young people who live outside Amsterdam and want to go to Moroccan parties have to travel. Many of those that I interviewed, who live outside Amsterdam, complained about the lack of Moroccan activities in their area. As one 17 year old guy explained:

‘It is difficult you know to go to Amsterdam. I cannot go by car and the train is very expensive. I can only go to Amsterdam if my older brother offers me a ride’.

As I mentioned in the second section, most organizers try to keep the price of entrance tickets as low as possible. Still, most Moroccan party organizations charge between 12 and 15 Euros because they

have booked live artists. Only the *Urban Rai Zone* party is much cheaper, meaning that it is accessible to a very young audience. A commonly heard response when asking about the costs of a night out was that many of the men and women saved money for a particular event. However, as the cost of entry to mainstream club nights is comparable to those of Moroccan parties, the issue of price has no impact on the choices made between regular nightlife and the Moroccan party scene.

### **8.5 Choosing your favourite party: negotiations between taste and accessibility**

Although there are very few players in the Moroccan leisure scene, young Moroccans can still make a choice between the parties arranged by the various organizations. Most of the young people I talked to did not experience any differences between the crowds at these diverse events. People only drew distinctions between the audiences at the *Urban Rai Zone*, because its visitors are very young. Indeed, during my visits to the *Urban Rai Zone*, it was evident that the majority of the audience was aged between 15 and 18. Many of the older visitors to, for example, *Lounge M* or *Hafla Anissa*, which are organized by *Marmoucha*, told me that the *Urban Rai Zone* is more of a kids party, and the people there who are older than 18 are working as volunteers.

None of the visitors I talked to mentioned differences other than age about the crowds at *Urban Rai Zone*. Unfortunately, I did not manage to gather any detailed information about these audiences. As I mentioned earlier, it was very difficult to persuade the consumers of the Moroccan leisure scene to agree to an extensive interview. Although the brief conversations during the parties were very helpful and rich in data, they did not provide me with detailed information on subtle differences or typifications of the crowds.

### **8.6 Summary**

The Moroccan leisure scene is relatively new. People started to organize parties to create a space for young Moroccans to come together and dance to their favourite music. Not many young Moroccan women participate in mainstream nightlife. Most of them

are not allowed to do so by their parents, or they share the opinion that clubbing late at night does not fit in with their lifestyle. The Moroccan organizations operating in this field had to deploy diverse strategies to make their activities attractive to their target audience. These strategies did not arise out of competition between the organizations, but were drawn up to reassure and gain the trust of the Moroccan audience which, in general, is not familiar with commercially organized events. Moreover, many of the respondents claimed to have had negative experiences with badly organized Moroccan parties in the past. Accordingly, all of the organizations carefully arrange their events and also try to avoid aggressive outbursts or problems in the crowd. Clean toilets, enough personnel to avoid long queues, only selling alcohol free beverages and a strict door policy were named as strategies with which to satisfy and attract an audience. Likewise, in their musical programming and the booking of artists, the organizers were careful to make appropriate choices. In order to appeal to the Moroccan community in general, they made sure that the music and artists on offer were from all of the regions of Morocco.

Many of the consumers of Moroccan parties were not satisfied by what was available in mainstream nightlife. Many missed the programming of Moroccan music and/or felt that these regular parties did not correspond to their lifestyle. Consequently, cultural factors, as well as restrictions, played an important role in the decision to choose the Moroccan leisure scene. In fact, for most of the Moroccan women, these specially organized parties were the only opportunity for them to go clubbing. Many of the men, on the other hand, were not constrained in their nightlife choices by their parents, but did not feel welcome in the mainstream nightlife circuit. Many said that they had had negative experiences in trying to get into a club. None of them viewed Moroccan parties as a good alternative for a night out, but enjoyed the ability to dance to Moroccan music with their friends.